

# WHY OH WHY CAN'T WE HAVE BETTER POLITICAL JOURNALISM, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI EDITION

Free prostitutes ... luxury yachts ... big cash payments ... free Cadillacs. All to influence a bunch of powerful men.

It reads just like the Jack Abramoff scandal, or the Duke Cunningham scandal. Or the tales of similar influence peddling that takes place on Wall Street but that get ignored unless they involve someone like Client 9.

But instead it's a 7,000-word expose of all the players University of Miami booster and recently convicted Ponzi schemer, Nevin Shapiro, allegedly rewarded while they were at Miami.

For the football fans among you, it'll be interesting for the lurid details, for the third strike in recent memory to the NCAA's claims to be running an amateur football program, for claims of a \$5,000 bounty placed—but never rewarded—for knocking Tim Tebow out of a game, and for the pro players—like Vince Wilfork, Jonathan Vilma, Devin Hester, and Willis McGahee—implicated in this.

But for the moment (until Trash Talk, I guess), I just wanted to salute the journalism that went into it.

Mind you, this story did not—as the Duke Cunningham story did—actually discover the story. Yahoo says it 100 hours of jailhouse interviews with Shapiro; it appears he wanted to tell the story to the press at the same time as he cooperated with the Feds and NCAA to ensure he accomplished his objective: revenge on those who blew him off after he got busted.

In 15 prison interviews with Yahoo! Sports

and hundreds of telephone and email interactions, Shapiro laid out a multitude of reasons for blowing the whistle on his illicit booster activity. Chief is his feeling that after spending eight years forging what he thought were legitimate friendships with players, he was abandoned by many of the same Miami athletes he treated so well. He told Yahoo! Sports that following his incarceration, he asked multiple players for financial help – either with bail money, or assistance to individuals close to the booster. Shapiro admitted some of those inquiries included angry letters and phone calls to players whom he provided benefits.

And Yahoo's task may have been helped by the sheer volume of detail released in Shapiro's Ponzi trial.

Nevertheless, they've gone to great length, over 11 months time, to recreate Shapiro's story, down to pictures and receipts.

Yahoo! Sports audited approximately 20,000 pages of financial and business records from his bankruptcy case, more than 5,000 pages of cell phone records, multiple interview summaries tied to his federal Ponzi case, and more than 1,000 photos. Nearly 100 interviews were also conducted with individuals living in six different states. In the process, documents, photos and 21 human sources – including nine former Miami players or recruits, and one former coach – corroborated multiple parts of Shapiro's rule-breaking.

And unlike the Duke Cunningham and Abramoff scandals, this reporting does a good job of thoroughly implicating the big names, down to the two Escalades Shapiro claims to have bought Wilfork.

So why am I bringing this up on a Wednesday, when I should be blogging politics (aside from the fact that you all should read it). Just to

imagine what would happen if political journalism could replicate all this—if we could get thorough stories of the parties and prostitutes used to influence the powerful men ruining our country.

It helps, mind you, that's there's still big money in sports. Yahoo Sports apparently have the resources to support this 11-month investigation. And it helps, too, that NCAA rules make these allegations real violations in a way that they wouldn't be for banksters (but clearly are for politicians).

One more thing we'll see from the comparison, I bet. In the same way that an alleged Roger Clemens lie was treated with far more aggressiveness than, say, Scott Bloch's lies, I suspect these violations (particularly now that Yahoo has exposed them) will be punished more aggressively than most similar allegations made about politicians.